

## Why do we need to raise the legal dropout age in Montana?

Superintendent Juneau believes we need to set an expectation for every child in Montana to graduate from high school. In today's global economy, a quality education is the key to economic prosperity for our young people. Our goal is that all Montana students graduate from high school college- and career-ready.

The current legal dropout age of 16 was established in 1921--a time of very different social and economic circumstances than today. On average, high school dropouts nationwide earn \$9,200 less per year than high school graduates and about one million dollars less over a lifetime than college graduates.<sup>1</sup>

**How do we compare?** Thirty states have a legal dropout age higher than Montana.<sup>2</sup>

- **Age 16: 20 states** and the Virgin Islands (AK, AZ, DE, FL, GA, ID, IA, KY, MD, MA, MN, MO, MT, NY, NC, ND, NJ, RI, VT, WY)
- **Age 17: 10 states** (AL, AR, CO, IL, ME, MS, PA, SC, TN, WV)
- **Age 18: 20 states** and the District of Columbia, American Samoa, and Puerto Rico (CA, CT, HI, IN, KS, LA, MI, NE, NV, NH, NM, OH, OK, OR, SD, TX, UT, VA, WA, WI)

The national median state graduation rate (graduates on time in four years) was 74.6 last year, while Montana had 80.7% of its students graduate on time. In 2009, 2,423 students in grades 7-12 dropped out of school. The 2008-2009 dropout rate (snapshot of one year's data) for Montana high schools was 5.1 percent.

## How does not addressing Montana's dropout rate impact our economy?

Nearly 80% of male inmates and 75% of women inmates at Montana State Prison are high school dropouts.<sup>3</sup>

In 2005, 21% of families with no high school diploma were living below the poverty line, compared to 7.1% of those with high school diplomas. In addition, workers who did not graduate from high school have an unemployment rate that is twice as high as someone who has a high school diploma.

According to the Alliance for Excellent Education, the lost lifetime earnings in Montana from dropouts this year alone total nearly \$830 million. Montana would save more than \$29.8 million in health care costs over the lifetime of each class of dropouts. The economy of Montana would see a combination of crime-related savings and additional revenue of about \$19.6 million each year if the male high school graduation rate would increase by just 5 percent.

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<sup>1</sup> "The Silent Epidemic, Perspectives of High School Dropouts," John M. Bridgeland, John J. Dilulio, Jr., and Karen Burke Morison, 2006

<sup>2</sup> Education Commission for the States, Compulsory School Age Requirements, June 2010

<sup>3</sup> Montana Department of Corrections, 2009 Biennial Report